

STUDENT TRAVEL

The Board of Education has long recognized that field trips are educationally sound and an important ingredient in the instructional program of the schools. On a regular basis we bring forward requests for approval of field trips that are considered school related. While the process has been fairly routine, (who, what, where, when, why and how), last spring saw some serious questions raised as to the process and ultimately what Board of Education approval means.

What follows is a series of questions and answers intended to provide you with information and guidance reflecting current practices and procedures.

1. What kinds of field trips are there?

Because they have different procedures for approval and different relationships to the district, it is helpful to think of field trips as falling into 3 categories. They are

- a. **Curriculum-related trips** within the normal school day. Examples include the Cayuga Nature Center, 8 Square School House, TST BOCES etc.
- b. **Extended curriculum-related trips** that extend beyond the normal school day, and may involve overnight accommodations. Examples include the Bio-Band, Music competitions, to Albany with school classes, Color Guard etc.
- c. **Co-Curriculum trips** that are not directly related to the curriculum and include such trips as Model UN, language club, class trips, Liberty Partnership trips, ski club etc.

2. In what instances is a field trip presented to the Board of Education for approval?

Typically, the Board is asked to approve extended curriculum and co-curriculum trips.

3. Why are Curriculum-related trips typically not presented to the Board of Education for approval?

These field trips have been given an internal approval by the principal and reflect known expectations of the district-employed staff. Such field trips are for students away from school premises, under the supervision of teacher(s), sometimes with parent chaperones, and with the activity considered an integral part of an approved course of study conducted for the purpose of providing a first-hand experience not available in the classroom. These school-sponsored activities are typically funded in the annual general fund budget for the school district. Because of the previous, such field trips have not been submitted to the Board of Education for approval and have required only the consent of the building principal.

4. What trips must the building principal approve?

The principal's approval must be sought for ALL of the following:

- Curriculum-related trips
- Extended curricular-related trips
- Co-curricular trips whenever a school employee is one of the organizers and information for the trip is being disseminated through school activities, facilities or organizations.

5. What process does the building principal follow in preparing a Curriculum-related or Extended curricular related trip request for Board of Education approval?

Early in the process, the principal generally acts as an advisor to the planners to be sure the trip as proposed meets all school policies and practices. At this time details are discussed including but not limited to the purpose of the field trip, destination, the time and dates of departure/ return, number of students involved, the cost of the field trip, source of funding for the field trip, number of chaperones and method of transportation to be used.

6. At this meeting what is the primary role of the principal in determining support for such approval?

While many factors come into play, the most obvious are questions dealing with the impact of this event on the operation of the normal school day. Included in this determination...

- Is the event curriculum, extended curriculum or co-curricular related?
- Ascertaining if participation in the trip is voluntary or required.
- Assuring that an adequate number of chaperones exists, including explaining expectations and responsibilities of a chaperone.
- Is funding available for all that may be participating?

7. Are there guidelines for deciding when to use a charter bus for a trip?

Our transportation department recommends considering using a charter bus for any trip that is more than 200 miles. It is recognized that a charter carrier may not always be available and a school bus could still be the mode of transportation used. Timely planning helps facilitate the reservation of a charter carrier. A list of approved carriers is on file through the transportation department and is available to building principals and staff upon request.

8. Do trip organizers require emergency contact information for the participants?

Yes. That information is collected along with signed permission forms by a parent/guardian for any student participating with the trip.

9. Why are extended curriculum-related trips and co-curricular trips submitted to the Board of Education for approval?

It has been our usual practice to bring before the Board of Education any field trip that will take place outside of the normal school day and/or involves distances greater than 200 miles. In the largest sense, Board of Education approval means simply the district is aware and has given its permission for the activity to take place as a school-sponsored and sanctioned event.

10. Is a Board of Education approved trip covered by our liability insurance?

Yes, the District has liability insurance that covers the advisors, additional chaperones, student participants and the school district for the duration of any appropriately approved field trip.

11. Is student accident insurance in effect for student injury or accident while on the trip?

The District provides a limited student accident insurance policy, but secondarily to the health insurance policy of the family. This policy provides worldwide coverage for students while they are attending school or are involved in other activities that are school sponsored and sanctioned. This coverage is a LIMITED COVERAGE POLICY that pays up to prescribed limits for various injuries. All claims must be submitted first through the parent's insurance policy.

If the parent's insurance does not pay all claims, then the unpaid portion may be submitted through the school's insurance company. Since the District's policy is a limited coverage policy, there may be times when the combined parent and school coverage still leaves a balance due. The parent is responsible for this payment.

If parents do not have insurance, the school insurance is then accessed (but still covers only to defined, limited levels). Any portion of the claim not covered by the District's policy is the financial responsibility of the parents.

Additionally, the District liability insurance coverage would be in place for all participating in any field trip that has been appropriately approved.

12. Is the District accident insurance policy in effect for adults on the trip?

No. An injury or accident to an adult involved in any field trip activity is not covered by the District's accident insurance policy. Accident coverage for any volunteer chaperone is under the terms of that adult's own health insurance policy. Individuals acting as volunteer chaperones are asked to check with their own carriers to ensure that coverage is active for the trip's duration and destination.

Volunteer chaperones participating in an appropriately approved trip are however covered by the District's liability insurance policy for negligence that results in injury to a student.

13. If students or adult chaperones do not have accident insurance, is there any way to get that coverage for this trip?

Our insurance carriers have advised that there is trip-travel insurance that is available commercially on a per trip basis. Advisors are asked to make this known to both student and adult participants for their consideration as a supplement to other coverages. The cost of these policies is nominal and could be included in the expenses of the cost of the trip for the participants, not an expense for the District.

14. What happens if the trip is cancelled?

It is important for parents to realize that the District does not determine cancellation policies (this is up to the travel company) and has no control over whether money is refunded. Advisors are encouraged to review and be familiar with company cancellation policies and procedures. This includes checking into the return of any money on deposit or paid to the travel company. Be aware that in refunding monies some companies may refund an amount paid less a service fee or a part of the deposit. The District has no liability for refunding any money paid for a cancelled trip.

15. Is there a way to protect against loss of funds paid to a travel company in the event a trip is cancelled?

It is possible to secure cancellation insurance commercially available through most companies. It is suggested to trip organizers that they include this coverage as a cost of the trip for the participants. Be careful, however, to read closely the situation in which cancellation will trigger reimbursement. These policies do not cover cancellation for any and all reasons, but only in limited circumstances.

16. May the Board of Education rescind a previously granted trip approval?

Yes. If the Board believes it prudent to withdraw its support for the trip, either for health/safety or because of an alteration of previously approved conditions, it may do so. If this did occur, the students and parents would be advised that the Board's support has been withdrawn and with it the access to liability and accident insurances from the school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon our study and review of the current practices/procedures in place and the belief that no single statement of policy could be created to cover the myriad of variables in place respective to insurance coverage, liability, etc. we suggest a continuance of current procedures supplemented with the following recommendations:

1. A consistent written explanation of the process to those that may be involved in planning such activities be included in all staff and district handbooks.
2. A requirement communicated to staff at the beginning of the school year that all trips are discussed, for tentative permissibility, with the principal before any communication (oral or written) is held with students or parents.
3. A requirement that this document accompany any first communication the planner of such an activity might have with the student and their parent/person in a parental relationship.
4. A standard notation that any Board of Education approval reserves to the parent the ultimate right of determining the appropriateness of their student's continued participation in the activity.
5. A notification that any significant change in the initial understanding/proposal as offered to the Board of Education, be brought back to the Board for review and approval.
6. A notification that trip cancellation insurance (and its cost) has been explained to the parent.
7. A notification that any money lost by the parent/student due to the cancellation of the trip by the Board, parent/student or travel company is the responsibility of the parent/student.